

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

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TAGS: PFOR, ML

SUBJ: HOW IS MALI CHANGING I: THE RURAL SCENE

1. IN THE ROUGHLY TWO AND ONE- HALF YEARS SINCE I ARRIVED IN MALI, LIFE FOR THE GREAT MAJORITY OF ITS PEOPLE HAS NOT SUPRISINGLY NOT CHANGED VERY MUCH. FOR MALI' S URBAN ELITES THE GOOD THINGS IN LIFE SEEM A LITTLE MORE ATTAINABLE. THEY ALSO BELIEVE THIS IS SO, TOO, WHICH POLITICALLY IS MORE RELEVANT THAN THE ACTUAL STATE OF AFFAIRS. LIFE, HOWEVER, FOR MOST OF MALI' S FARMERS AND HERDSMEN (90 PERCENT OF POUPLATION) GOES ON MUCH AS BEFORE. ABOUT HALF OF MALI' S FARMERS AND HERDSMEN HAVE BEEN BADLY ENOUGH HIT BY DROUGHT SO THAT IT WILL TAKE SEVERAL YEARS TO RECOVER. IN TIME- HONORED AFRICAN WAY, MANY HAVE HAD TO TAKE OFFMMCMPORARILY TO STAY WITH RELATIVES IN BETTER- WATERED AREAS. HOWEVER, THEY CONSIDER DJOUGHT ATN CROP FAILURE THEIR INEVITABLE LOT AND DON' T BLAME THE GOVERNMENT, WHICH HAS WON CREDIT FOR ITS GOOD ORGANIZATION OF EMERGENCY FEEDING OPERATIONS.

2. MALIAN COUNTRY PEOPLE, GENERALLY, DISTRUST GOVERNMENT, PERSONIFIED AS IT IS BY TAX COLLECTORS. HERE AS ELSEWHERE IT' S " THOSE POLITICIANS IN BAMAko" AGAINST 9" US". FOR SEVERAL YEARS MANY FARMERS HAD EXPECTED MILITARY COMMITTEE TO BEAR DOWN ON THEM. HOWEVER, OVER LAST TWO YEARS MOST FARMERS HAVE LOST

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THEIR FEARS. NOW, UNLIKE IN MODIBO' S DAYS WITH ITS " DIRECTED LABOR" AND FORCED GRAIN DELIVERIES, WEIGHT OF THE GOVERNMENT ON FARMERS IS LIGHT.

3. ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF MALI' S FARMERS' LIVES HAVE BEEN IMPROVED BY ACTIONS OF MILITARY COMMITTEE. THIS IS A POOR COUNTRY, PARTS OF IT DESPERATELY POOR. FARMERS HAVE FEW ILLUSIONS ABOUT THINGS GETTING BETTER. ONLY 5 PERCENT OF MALI' S FARM

CHILDREN GO TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AND EXCEPT IN LARGER FARM TOWNS THERE IS USUALLY NOT EVEN RUDIMENTARY HEALTH CARE. YET AT LEAST THOSE MALIAN FARMERS WHO LIVE IN NIGER AND SENEGAL RIVER VALLEYS (PROBABLY 80 PERCENT) ARE IN NORMAL YEARS BETTER FED (MORE MEAT AND FISH; MILLET INSTEAD OF CASSAVA) THAN MOST OTHER AFRICANS.

4. IN THE LAST TWO YEARS COTTON PRODUCTION INCREASED 17 PERCENT RICE 20 PERCENT, ACCOUNTING FOR LARGE PART OF OVERALL MODEST 2.8 PERCENT INCREASE IN MALIAN GNP. SUCCESS OF INTEGRATED AGRICULTURAL " OPERATIONS", WHICH COMBINE EXTENSION (OFTEN REMARKABLY GOOD) WITH CREDIT AND PURCHASING OF FINISHED PRODUCTS, IS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE INCREASES. I CONSIDER THESE " OPERATIONS", ORIGINALLY FRENCH- RUN BUT NOW LARGELY MALIANIZED, TO BE THE MOST EXCITING AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA. SOME OF

AGRICULTURAL CHANGES BEING BROUGHT HERE POINT WAY FOR ADVANCES ELSEWHERE IN SAHEL. ALSO, ENOUGH MALIAN FARMERS ARE GETTING " RICH", O BY THEIR OWN STANDARDS, ON COTTON, PEANUTS, TOBACCO AND VEGETABLE PRODUCTION TO RAISE GENERAL FARM MORALE, AND HOPE FOR FUTURE. MILITARY COMMITTEE IS COMMITTED TO EXTENDING THIS " OPERATION" FORMULA AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE.

5. TOTAL MALIAN FARMING IS, HOWEVER, OPTIMISTICALLY NOT OPTIMISTIC. MALI AND PARTS OF WEST AFRICA LIKE EASTERN MAURITANIA WHICH DEPEND ON NIGER RIVER BASIN FOR GRAIN ARE IN MORE TROUBLE THAN THEY SEEM TO KNOW. POPULATION IS DOUBLING ROUGHLY EVERY 25 YEARS, BUT GRAIN PRODUCTION IS APPARENTLY NOT INCREASING. THIS DUE IN PART TO SHIFTS TO OTHER CROPS. MALIAN GOVERNMENT VERY AWARE THAT HEROIC EFFORTS MUST BE MADE TO BRING MODERN TECHNIQUES TO BEAR ON MILLET PRODUCTION. SUCCESS IS NOT GUARANTEED, HOWEVER. IT WILL BE MUCH HARDER TO EFQAND UNCLASSIFIED

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" OPERATIONS" TO GRAIN PRODUCTION WHERE FARMERS SEEM MORE RELUCTANT TO TRY NEW METHODS. OTHER LIMITATIONS ARE LACK OF KIND OF MODERN SCIENTIFIC DATA FOR MILLET WHICH MADE POSSIBLE LARGE COTTON (AND ELSEWHERE RICE AND WHEAT) INCREASES. FROM THIS NEED TO PUSH GRAIN PRODUCTION STEMS MALIAN ATTENTION TO AND CONCERN ABOUT US EFFORTS TO HELP OPERATION MILLET - SENOU. WITH OUR OWN GRAIN " SURPLUSES" RAPIDLY DISAPPEARING AND UNLESS

MALI CAN SOMEHOW RATHER RAPIDLY INCREASE PRODUCTION, RESULT WILL BE EITHER PROGRESSIVE MALNUTRITION OR KIND OF MASSIVE RURAL EXODUS, WHICH IS BECOMING POLITICALLY LESS AND LESS ACCEPTABLE IN WEST AFRICA. CERTAINLY MALI' S TOWNS CAN' T PROVIDE FOOD AND JOBS IF THIS HAPPENS.

6. UNTIL DROUGHT HAT AND MALI LOST PERHAPS 40 PERCENT OF SAHELIAN HERD, CATTLE PICTURE SEEMED TO BE PICKING UP SPEED IN RIGHT DIRECTION. DEMAND FOR MEAT IN COASTAL CITIES RAPIDLY INCREASING. TRUCKING OF BEST CATTLE IS GETTING GOOD START, AND TECHNIQUES OF CATTLE FEEDING ON COTTON SEED CATCHING ON. NUMBER OF FARMERS IN GRASS- RICH AND WELL- WATERED COTTON AREA KEEPING SMALL HERDS HAS ALMOST DOUBLED IN LAST SEVERAL YEARS. THESE ARE TRENDS WHICH WE SEEK TO MAGNIFY IN ABOUT- TO- BE- LAUNCHED US LIVESTOCK PROGRAM. REDUCTION IN SAHELIAN HERDS BY DRASTIC NATURAL SELECTION WILL REDUCE PRESSURE ON RICH NIGER RIVER PASTURE LANDS, BUT FOR YEARS TO COME IT ALSO LIKELY TO REDUCE CATTLE AVAILABLE FOR SOUTHERN COAST MARKETS, RESULTS OF WHICH ARE HARD TO PREDICT.

7. IN SUM, ALTHOUGH MALI' S RIVER VAGOEYS REMAIN OVERALL BEST AGRICULTURAL REGION OF WEST AFRICA AND MODERNIZED FARMING PARTICULARLY IN COTTON MOVING AHEAD AS FAST OR FASTER THAN ANY PLACE IN TROPICAL AFRICA, MALI HAS NOT EVEN BEGUN TO SOLVE PROBLEM OF FEEDING ITS OWN, LET ALONE OTHER WEST AFRICAN PEOPLES.

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